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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 002103

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)  
SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: MACEDONIAN ATHLETES DEPART FROM  
THESSALONIKI GAMES

REF: EMBASSY SKOPJE E-MAIL OF 10/22/07

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin Quinville for 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) This message has been cleared with Embassy Skopje.

12. (SBU) Emboff met October 23 with Greek MFA Macedonia Desk Officer Nicholas Plexidas to follow-up ref and press reports that the Macedonian 133-member team of youth athletes had walked out on October 20 from the week-long "Southeastern European Countries Games," hosted by Greece in Thessaloniki because of various humiliations. Plexidas, who had worked closely with the games organizers throughout, made the following points:

-- The Name: Because the games were taking place in Thessaloniki -- the epicenter of Greek nationalist sentiment related to "Macedonia" -- Greek officials took pains from the start to manage "the name." Greek officials had coordinated with the Macedonian Consul General in Thessaloniki on arrangements. Greece was willing to accept "FYROM," "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," or the Olympic designation -- MKD; written instructions were issued by the MFA and Ministry of Sports to the games organizers on this point. Greece was not willing to accept "Macedonia" or "Republic of Macedonia/Republika Makedonija." This had been understood and accepted by authorities from Skopje.

-- Customs Problems: When the team arrived at the border, Greek customs officials discovered a number of t-shirts, including athletic uniforms, bearing designations "Macedonia." Plexidas termed this "a provocation," and Greek officials did not allow this material to enter Greece; however, they did not seize the clothing/athletic uniforms. Rather, it was given to Macedonian customs officials at the border to be held for the team upon its return.

-- Use of the Name During the Games: During Opening Ceremonies, the announcer referred to "FYROM." When Macedonian officials protested and asked that "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" be used instead, the announcer was told that this should be the practice for the remainder of the games, and the team was reintroduced at the Opening Ceremony. However, two days later (and Plexidas demurred on whether this had been intentional or as a result of carelessness) the announcer again referred to the team as "FYROM" and not/not "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." On this basis, Plexidas said, the Macedonia team left the games.

13. (SBU) Plexidas was unaware of any Macedonian complaints about being hosted in less attractive hotels than other teams or any failure to play the Macedonian national anthem.

14. (C) Embassy Athens Comment: We are reporting the Greek MFA's explanations as they were shared with us. However, even taking the MFA explanations at face value, the Greek

behavior raises questions. It would not be common practice for Greek customs to search the luggage of a team of visiting athletes. Furthermore, Plexidas was unable to provide a good explanation why the announcer at the games reverted to "FYROM" instead of "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" later in the games, notwithstanding the fact that the Macedonians had protested the use of "FYROM" and had specifically asked that "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" be used instead. End Comment.

15. (C) Embassy Skopje comment: It is especially unfortunate that despite Macedonian authorities' willingness to conform to the 1995 Interim Agreement and be designated "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," means were found, including the repeated use of the despised acronym FYROM, to produce a negative outcome. Whether fully or only partially on purpose, Greek actions in this episode continue to elicit a strong negative reaction in Macedonia and put pressure on the GoM to be more outspoken. We have heard that the GoM is undertaking a diplomatic and media effort to advance its cause vis-a-vis Greece. Publication today in the newspaper Vest of vintage diplomatic notes from the GoG to the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, aiming to demonstrate that the usage "Republic of Macedonia" was not a problem then, is evidently one step in this effort. We continue to urge the GoM to take a positive, constructive approach to the name dispute and to overall bilateral relations. End Comment.

16. (SBU) Meanwhile, over the weekend, PM Karamanlis continued the drumbeat of public expression against Macedonian NATO accession absent an agreed solution on the name. In a public meeting of the ruling New Democracy Central Committee on October 20, Karamanlis said:

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Begin Quote

Our policy in the regiothis go constructive participation in the UN process to find a mutually acceptable solution to the outstanding issue of their name. By persisting with intransigence and actions ignoring history, by persisting with propaganda of an irredentist rationale, alliance relationships cannot be built. Likewise, solidarity relationships, like those required for participation in NATO and the EU, cannot be built. Our position is clear and decisive. Our policy is that of the future, not the past. Our message is clear. Let the Skopje government interpret it correctly. The time for decisions has arrived.

End Quote  
COUNTRYMAN